

# Legislative News



March 26, 2010

## Rebooting Missouri's Education System



On Tuesday, the Senate spent the day discussing ideas that were submitted for the "[Rebooting Government](#)" initiative. This initiative invites citizens to submit suggestions on how to rework the state's government. For this special session, the senators were broken down into [eight different committees](#) of four senators each to discuss the suggestions that were sent in and their own ideas on how to help Missouri work through the budget crisis. The committees included Agriculture/Outdoors/Department of Natural Resources, Courts/Legal/Department of Public Safety, Education, General Government/Office of Administration, Retirement, Social Programs, Tax Structure,

and Transportation. At the end of the day each committee came up with a list of recommendations to present to the senate.

The committee on education read over 100 emails submitted by citizens who had suggestions for K-12 and higher education. The first email of the day suggested combining several state colleges and universities in an effort to streamline services and save money. This sparked a debate among committee members about which institutions could be combined and which ones could come together for specific partnerships. [Senator Rita Heard Days](#) expressed the importance of taking time to fully discuss these ideas while [Senator Yvonne Wilson](#) asked that everyone consider the mission of each institution before any decisions are made. The consensus of the committee was that while it may make sense to encourage colleges and universities to identify ways to share some "backoffice" operations and services, it is likely that each institution will remain distinct in the coming years.

Later in the day, [Governor Jay Nixon's](#) policy director Jeff Harris made a presentation to the committee about the Governor's suggestions for education. One suggestion was to combine [DESE](#) and the [MDHE](#). Har-

ris explained that this move would save the state money and would improve educational coordination in the state. He also noted that before the 1970s, higher education was a division within the Department of Education. Harris also reiterated the Governor's commitment to restricting student financial aid to students attending public colleges and universities. Harris said that the extremely difficult financial situation the state is in warrants this restriction.

After all suggestions were discussed, the committee came up with several recommendations to bring back to the Senate, including two related to higher education. The first suggestion was combining of DESE and the MDHE. The committee also proposed that higher education institutions research ways to coordinate administration, payroll, and certain other functions in an effort to cut costs throughout the state.

Although the meeting for Rebooting Government has already taken place, Missourians are encouraged to continue to submit their ideas through the [online site](#) created for this initiative. Senators will continue to review the recommendations during the budget process.



## Update on the MDHE Budget

The House passed all operating budget bills this week and sent them to the Senate. The only changes to the higher education budget during floor debate and action were some changes to certain salaries in the [MDHE](#) and the addition of \$400,000 for the [Missouri Rehabilitation Center](#). Overall the House recommended appropriation in HB 2003 is about \$3.1 million higher than the Governor's recommendations. The major changes are:

- \$7.5 million increase for [Bright Flight](#) to help fund the new award amounts established in SB 389 that first go into effect this fall
- \$2.7 million decrease in [A+](#) associated with savings anticipated due to the increasing Pell Grant

- \$6.5 million decrease in [Access Missouri](#) that is intended to allow for the continuation of the current year award percentages
- \$2 million for the [UMKC-MSU pharmacy doctorate program](#)
- \$2.4 million for the [UM Hospitals and Clinics](#)

It is anticipated that the [Senate Appropriations Committee](#) will begin work on the bills early next week. All budget bills must be passed by the General Assembly by May 7.

## Access Award Amount Proposal Comes Up Briefly

Senators [Kurt Schaefer's](#) and [David Pearce's SB 784](#), which would change [Access Missouri](#) award amounts, was taken up briefly on the Senate floor on Tuesday night. Shortly after the bill was taken up for consideration, though, it became clear that some senators had significant questions about the legislation. At Senator Schaefer's request, the bill was set on the informal calendar and the Senate moved on to another bill. Although it is possible that the bill will be taken up again, the date on which that might occur is currently unknown.

## Senate Education Votes on Two Higher Education Bills

The [Senate Education Committee](#) met on Wednesday in an executive session and voted to pass on two higher education bills. [Senator David Pearce's SB 733](#), which modifies deferral requirements for certain [Bright Flight](#)-eligible students, was passed after committee members voted to add language that clarifies how awards are prioritized when program is less than fully funded. The version approved by the committee directs the MDHE to make awards to students in the top three percent of test-takers before making awards to students in the fourth and fifth percentiles. SB 733 has been placed on the

senate calendar for perfection.

Another bill filed by [Senator David Pearce, SB 936](#), was also voted to pass during this meeting. This bill establishes the Missouri Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Initiative within the MDHE. The goal of the initiative would be to support activities that increase interest among students in STEM fields and to increase the number of students who enter these fields at Missouri's public higher education institutions. This bill has not yet been placed on the senate calendar.

## LEGISLATIVE NEWS

## House and Senate Proposals to Bring Scholarships to MDHE Advance

This week, two bills that would transfer scholarships assigned in statute to other state agencies to the [MDHE](#) made significant progress. [Representative Jake Zimmerman's HB 1858](#), which would officially bring the [Minority and Underrepresented Environmental Literacy Program](#) from [DNR](#) to the MDHE, was perfected in the House. It still needs final approval by the House and will then be sent to the Senate for that body's consideration.

[Senator Wes Shoemyer's SB 963](#), which would officially bring the [Minority and Underrepresented Envi-](#)

[ronmental Literacy Program](#) from DNR and the [Minority Teaching Scholarship](#) from [DESE](#) to the MDHE, received final approval from the Senate. The bill will now be sent to the House.

Both the Minority and Underrepresented Environmental Literacy Program and the Minority Teaching Scholarship were assigned to the MDHE through the budget process last year, so the department is currently administering both programs. HB 1858 and SB 963 simply make that transfer official and permanent.



## Upcoming Committee Meetings

The [Senate Education Committee](#) will meet on Wednesday, March 31 at 1:30 p.m. in the Senate Lounge. The committee will hear the following bill:

[Sen. David Pearce's SB 899](#), which establishes the Missouri Promise Program to provide financial aid awards to students pursuing higher education at certain institutions.